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# State employees get promised bonus

## Special legislative session secures last half of retiree bonus

By Dana Beyerle Montgomery Bureau Chief MONTGOMERY | Jane Griffin retired from the Department of Mental Health in 2001 on a fixed state income, so she was glad legislators in the special session funded the last half of a promised retired state employee bonus.

'We're pleased whenever our legislators give us a little extra money to help us along our way,' said Griffin, who lives in Tuscaloosa, Monday.

The one-time bonus checks will be sent in the middle of December, as they were last year. About 20,000 retirees are eligible.

'That's one of the more needy times for cash,' said Bill Shoemaker of Tuscumbia, who retired from the Department of Transportation after 40 years.

Shoemaker, the mayor of Tuscumbia, is president-elect of the Alabama Retired State Employees Association, which lobbied for the bonus.

Last year the Legislature gave state employees a 7 percent raise spread over this fiscal year and the next. The retired state employee bonus was spread over two years, and in the special session that ended last week the Legislature funded the second half of the bonus.

The active state employee pay raise for the new fiscal year Oct. 1 is 3.5 percent. The one-time bonus in mid-December will be \$1 for each month worked, so an employee who worked 25 years will get \$300.

The bonus comes at a good time for retirees who haven't reached age 65, the age at which they can enlist in Medicare and save money on medical premiums.

Retired Department of Human Resources employee Susan Weathers of Marshall County said her \$300 bonus almost covers the increase in her medical insurance premiums.

'I ended up with less of a retirement check than the bonus,' Weathers said. 'But at least the bonus paid for the insurance coverage increase. I appreciated it.'

ARSEA executive director Liane Kelly said non-state retirees, such as municipal employees who are in the state retirement system, also are eligible for a bonus. Their bonuses, however, must come from their employer.

She said the ARSEA is pushing for a cost of living allowance, since the average retirement check is about \$1,400 a month.

'That will continue to be our goal, and we'll work toward that,' ARSEA President-elect Shoemaker said. 'We see the purchasing power of our dollars dwindling for gasoline and especially medical costs.'

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